

The Industrial Athlete

Exercises for Strength & Injury Prevention

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Commercial fishermen are industrial athletes

The work demands endurance, raw strength, balance, and the ability to repeat the same motions for hours in cold, wet, and unstable conditions. **Like any athlete, the body breaks down without proper maintenance, and unlike a sport with an off-season built in, fishing doesn't always stop. Investing in your physical fitness isn't just about performance, it's about longevity.**

The goal is to stay strong enough to do the work, resilient enough to recover from it, and healthy enough to keep doing it for years to come.



Why It Matters

The most common injuries in commercial fishing, lower back strain, rotator cuff tears, wrist and hand tendon issues, and knee problems, are largely preventable with consistent strength training and mobility work. Most of these injuries don't happen all at once. They're the result of repetitive stress on a body that hasn't been conditioned to handle it. Building strength in the right places creates a buffer between the work and the breakdown.

Key Muscle Groups to Prioritize Year-Round

Posterior Chain (Lower Back, Glutes, Hamstrings): The engine behind almost every movement on a boat. Deadlifts, hip hinges, and glute bridges are your foundation.

Core: the deep stabilizing muscles that protect your spine during lifting and absorb the constant movement of the boat. Planks, dead bugs, and carries over crunches.

Shoulders and Rotator Cuff: Hauling, pulling, and throwing gear puts enormous strain on the shoulder joint. Band work, face pulls, and controlled pressing keep the joint healthy.

Grip and Forearms: Often overlooked but critical. Farmer carries, dead hangs, and towel pull-ups build the grip endurance that saves your hands and wrists over a long trip.

Hips and Knees: Balance and stability on a moving deck start in the hips. Single-leg work like lunges, step-ups, and single-leg deadlifts builds the stabilizers that prevent falls and knee strain.

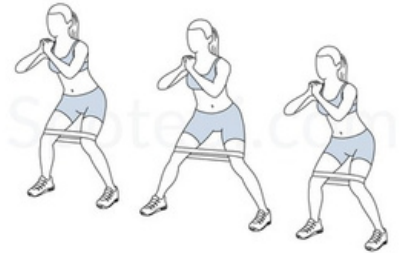
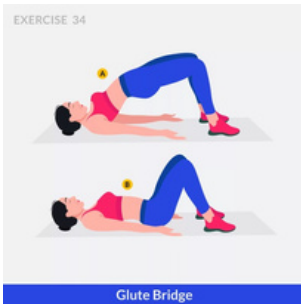
EXERCISES FOR EACH KEY MUSCLE GROUP

Posterior Chain (Lower Back, Glutes, Hamstrings)

Aim to do each exercise for 10 reps for 2-3 sets
or at least 15 times

At Home (Bodyweight)

- Glute bridges
- Single-leg glute bridges
- Bodyweight Romanian deadlift (hinge to touch the floor)
- Good mornings (hands behind head, hinge at hip)
- Donkey kicks
- Reverse hyperextensions (face down on a table or bench)
- Lateral Band walks



With Weights

- Deadlifts (barbell or dumbbells)
- Romanian deadlifts
- Trap bar deadlifts
- Kettlebell swings
- Dumbbell sumo deadlifts
- Weighted squats



EXERCISES FOR EACH KEY MUSCLE GROUP

Hips & Knees

Aim to do each exercise for 10 reps for 2-3 sets
or at least 15 times

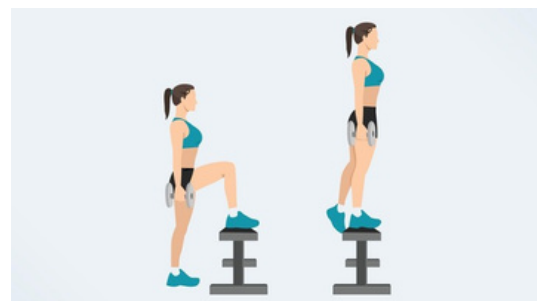
At Home (Bodyweight)

- Reverse lunges
- Lateral lunges
- Step-ups (use stairs or a sturdy box)
- Single-leg deadlifts (bodyweight)
- Clamshells
- Monster walks (with a band around ankles)
- Wall sits
- Bulgarian split squats (rear foot elevated on a couch or chair)



With Weights

- Goblet squats (dumbbell or kettlebell)
- Dumbbell or barbell lunges
- Single-leg Romanian deadlifts
- Step-ups with dumbbells
- Leg press (if gym access)
- Weighted Bulgarian split squats



EXERCISES FOR EACH KEY MUSCLE GROUP

Core

Aim to do each exercise for 10 reps for 2-3 sets
or at least 15 times

At Home (Bodyweight)

Planks (front and side)

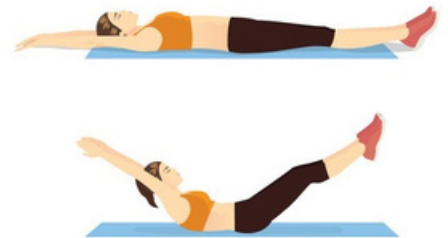
Dead bugs

Bird dogs

Hollow body holds

Mountain climbers Bear

crawls



With Weights

- Pallof press (with band or cable)
- Weighted carries (suitcase carry, farmer carry)
- Russian twists
- weighted dead bugs
- Dumbbell suitcase deadlift



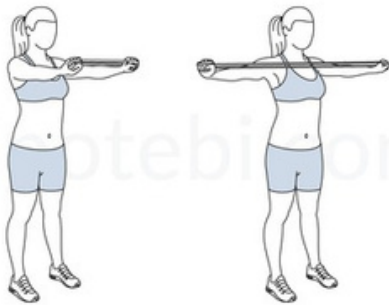
EXERCISES FOR EACH KEY MUSCLE GROUP

Shoulders & Rotator Cuff

Aim to do each exercise for 10 reps for 2-3 sets
or at least 15 times

At Home (Bodyweight/Band)

- Band pull-aparts
- Band face pulls
- Wall slides
- YTW raises (lying face down, lift arms in each position)
- Prone shoulder circles
- Push-up plus (protract at the top of a push-up)



With Weights

- Dumbbell lateral raises
- Dumbbell front raises
- Overhead press (dumbbell or barbell)
- Arnold press
- Bent-over rear delt flys
- Cable or band face pulls
- Dumbbell external rotation (lying on side)



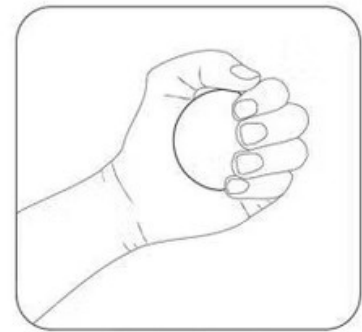
EXERCISES FOR EACH KEY MUSCLE GROUP

Grip & Forearms

Aim to do each exercise for 10 reps for 2-3 sets
or at least 15 times

At Home

- Dead hangs from a bar or beam
- Towel pull-ups (drape a towel over a bar, grip both ends)
- Bucket of rice (dig, twist, and grip through dry rice)
- Squeeze a tennis ball or stress ball
- Wrist curls and reverse wrist curls (use a water jug if no weights)
- Plate pinches (pinch two plates together and hold)



POWER GRIP

Squeeze the ball with your fingers and thumb

With Weights

- Farmer carries (heavy dumbbells or kettlebells)
- Barbell or dumbbell wrist curls
- Reverse curls
- Thick bar or towel-wrapped bar holds
- Loaded dead hangs (weight belt or dumbbell between feet)



EXERCISES FOR EACH KEY MUSCLE GROUP

Building Your Own Workout

Understanding Sets and Reps

Before putting a workout together, it helps to know the basics. A rep (repetition) is one complete movement — one squat, one push-up, one deadlift. A set is a group of reps performed back-to-back before resting. So, "3 sets of 10" means you do 10 reps, rest, then do 10 more, rest, and finally do 10 more.

A simple guide for goals:

Strength: 3–5 sets of 4–8 reps, heavier weight, longer rest (2–3 min)

Muscle building: 3–4 sets of 8–12 reps, moderate weight, medium rest (60–90 sec)

Endurance/conditioning: 2–3 sets of 15–20 reps, lighter weight, short rest (30–45 sec)

The sweet spot is 3 sets of 10–12 reps, enough to build real strength without needing a full gym setup or hours of free time.

What Is a Circuit?

A circuit is when you move from one exercise to the next with little to no rest in between, completing all exercises before resting. Instead of doing all 3 sets of one exercise before moving on, you rotate through a list of exercises and repeat the whole loop 2–3 times.

Why circuits work well for your schedule off the water:

Time efficient: a full circuit can take 20–30 minutes

Builds both **strength and cardio** endurance simultaneously

Mimics the varied, continuous physical demand of a day on the water

Easy to scale up or down based on how your body feels

EXERCISES FOR EACH KEY MUSCLE GROUP

Building Your Own Workout

How to Pick and Choose Exercises

You don't need to hit every muscle group every day. A simple approach is to pick one or two exercises per muscle group and rotate so nothing gets overtrained. A balanced session should include:

- 1 posterior chain movement
- 1 core movement
- 1 shoulder/rotator cuff movement
- 1 grip/forearm movement
- 1 hip/knee movement

That's 5 exercises. Run through all 5 back to back, rest 1–2 minutes, repeat 3 times. Done.

When to Fit It In

You don't need a gym membership or a dedicated hour. Here's how it can realistically fit into a fishing schedule.

Morning before a trip: Stretching on the steam out, focus on activation and mobility to prep the body for the day.

Weather or gear days: When you're not on the water, use that window for a full-strength session with weights if you have access.

Evening after a trip: Keep it short and recovery-focused like stretching, light core, and shoulder band work if able. Don't go hard just focus on eating well and light stretches. Rolling could help too.

Off days: This is your main training window. Prioritize the heavier lifts and full circuits here.

Example Weekly Structure

Year-round fisherman working 4–5 days on the water:

Day on the water: 10-minute stretch on the ride out

First day off: Full circuit workout, moderate weight, 3 rounds

Second day off: Active recovery like a walk, swim, yoga, or light mobility work

Repeat

Recovery Tips

Commercial fishing is physically taxing. Hauling traps, mending gear, and working long hours on deck puts strain on your back, shoulders, hips, and hands. After days or weeks at sea, your muscles might be overworked and your joints might feel stiff from repetitive motion and cold, wet conditions. Taking the proper physical care of your body lessens pain and reduces risk of injury.

Foam Rollers

Commonly found in gyms and physical therapy clinics, foam rollers are used for a technique called self-myofascial release, essentially a form of self-massage. Rolling applies pressure to tight or overworked muscles, helping to break up adhesions and improve blood flow, which speeds up recovery. Regular use can increase flexibility in both muscles and connective tissue, improving your range of motion and reducing the risk of injury during physical activity.



Stretching

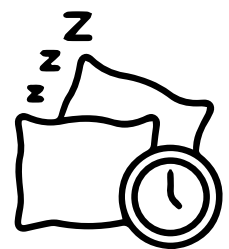
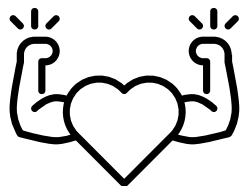
Taking at least five to ten minutes to stretch when you get ashore can make a real difference in how your body feels and reduce soreness. Focusing on the lower back, hamstrings, chest, and shoulders helps release the tension that builds up from constant lifting and hunching over gear. Consistent stretching after a trip not only speeds up recovery but helps protect your body over time.



Recovery Tips

Other considerations

- Increase protein intake based on activity level
- Ensure hydration throughout the activity and after
- Stretch on the ride out or maybe on the ride in from fishing
- Use a roller to help with injury prevention and any soreness or overuse of muscles by increasing blood flow
- Make sure you're getting enough sleep
- Apply heat to **stiff** joints and sore muscles (lower back, shoulders, hands)
- Ice any **acute pain or inflammation**
- Limit screen time the first night back to support better sleep quality
- Build strength training into your off-season or off-days, focusing on the posterior chain (back, glutes, hamstrings) to counteract the forward-leaning posture fishing demands



MAINE AGRABILITY

YOGA STRETCHES FOR FISHERMEN



Cow Pose

Inhaling, fill the lungs. Lift the chest and feel the spine extend. Hold for 2-3 breaths.



Cat Pose

Exhaling, tuck the chin into the chest and slowly round the back. Hold for 2-3 breaths.



Seated Twist

Inhaling, sit tall, with weight evenly distributed on the sit bones. Place your right hand against the outside of the left knee. Exhaling, slowly turn your torso and head to the left. Look toward your left shoulder, or in the direction of the left shoulder. Hold for 2-3 breaths. Repeat on the opposite side.



Side Bend

Inhaling, stand tall. Bring your right hand up above your head. Exhaling, stretch hand over head and arc body to the left. Feel the stretch in the right side of the body. Look straight ahead up toward hand. Do not collapse into the left side. Breathe and hold. Repeat on the opposite side.



Standing Twist

Step left foot on a lobster trap or other sturdy surface 12" to 18" high. Feet are a comfortable distance apart. Place the right hand on the outside of the left knee. Raise left hand out to the side at shoulder height. Inhale, lengthen spine. Exhale, turn head and torso to the left. Hold for 2-3 breaths. Stand a bit taller with each inhale. Repeat on the opposite side.



Standing Twist With Gaff

With feet hip distance apart, rest a tool lightly on the shoulders. Hold the tool with arms extended. Inhale, lengthen spine. Exhale, turn your torso and head to the right. Hold for 2-3 breaths. Inhale, return to center. Repeat on the opposite side.



Warrior Pose

Hold onto a support with your right hand. Step left foot back about three feet, turn foot about 45 degrees left. Bend your right knee and align directly over your ankle. Keep your left leg straight. With equal weight on both feet, reach both hands skyward. Take a few deep breaths. Repeat with right foot back.



Half Down Dog

Place hands on a prop or wall at waist height. Inhale, step both feet back. Exhale, bend from the hip, pushing away from the wall to lengthen spine. Arms are extended in front of you at shoulder height. With head between arms, look downward. Keep knees slightly bent. Hold for 2-3 breaths.

Have any questions or suggestions?
Email me: belladziak@neyoungfishermen.org